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SUBJECT: FIJI AND TONGA DEPLOYMENT PLANS TO IRAQ: A STATUS
REPORT

REF: A. USDAO SUVA 050241Z APR 06

B. SUVA 133

Classified By: Amb. Dinger, Sec. 1.4, B and D.

1. (C) As Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama and Tonga Defense Service (TDS) Commander Uta'atu prepare to visit Washington later this month for Iraq Coalition planning talks, we provide this update on the state of play regarding deployment decisions.

Fiji and the Iraq Coalition: a state of flux

2. (C) Commodore Bainimarama has decided that he wants the RFMF to deploy a small contingent as part of the Coalition of the Willing, in addition to the ongoing RFMF deployments as protection details for the UN there (Ref A and previous). The Fiji Government has not decided whether to join the Coalition. As PM Qarase predicted when General Abizaid visited Suva in February, early elections are to take place (May 6-13). In the meantime Fiji's caretaker government cannot undertake new policy decisions, such as whether to join the Coalition. RFMF Commander Bainimarama is sending two officers to CENTCOM for planning purposes, but nothing is final.

3. (C) If PM Qarase returns to power, he has told us he intends to "sort out" the situation with Commodore Bainimarama, which is untenable. Bainimarama has indicated he would likely act to remove a new Qarase government, if that government were to continue past policies (Ref B and previous). We often find ourselves agreeing with Bainimarama about particular substantive issues and strongly disagreeing with his advocacy methods, which include saber-rattling and threatening a coup. All of this leaves Fiji's potential Iraq Coalition deployment in considerable flux. We have made clear to all parties the U.S. interest in a stable Fiji that can contribute productively to peacekeeping operations around the world, including in Iraq, and we have similarly made clear to all the U.S. view that the military in a democracy must be subordinate to the elected civilian leadership.

Tonga and the Coalition: likely but not yet final

4. (C) Regarding Tonga, the recent visit by Foreign/Defense Minister Tu'a and TDS Commander Uta'atu to Washington and Tampa was fruitful. The TDS plans to submit a formal proposal to the Tonga Defense Board for the deployment to Iraq of another Tonga platoon, probably to take place in the fall and to continue indefinitely via multiple rotations. A

previous Tonga platoon deployed to Iraq for 6 months in 2004.
The TDS expects approval.

15. (C) When new Prime Minister Sevele stopped by the Embassy on April 6, we noted the importance of such a deployment to U.S. and global interests. Sevele did not appear well-briefed on the matter, said he has no strong views either way, but said it is an issue which should go to Cabinet and Privy Council for final judgment. In that context, he said it would be important to know U.S., U.K., and Australian long-term plans for their own deployments to Iraq. We said our understanding is that all three intend to remain in Iraq as long as is necessary to achieve our important goals, and we offered to provide further details if needed. Sevele asked what sort of U.S. support would be available for a Tonga deployment. We assured him that such support is planned, and Tu'a and Uta'atu have been well-briefed on the details.

Comment

16. (C) Our impression from Foreign/Defense Minister Tu'a and TDS Commander Uta'atu is that Tonga's new deployment is very likely. Still, it could be useful for our Australian and British colleagues to reinforce with PM Sevele their own intentions to stay the course in Iraq. The situation in Fiji is more murky, given the extremely strained relations between Commodore Bainimarama and the current, caretaker government. The coming election results, the nature of the next government, and the RFMF's role in support of or opposition to that government will affect the Iraq-deployment decision. As previously discussed (Ref B), Bainimarama's Washington meetings will be an opportunity to reinforce USG messages regarding the importance of the RFMF playing its proper,

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subordinate role domestically in Fiji as it contributes productively to peacekeeping abroad.
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